

# **Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Investment Strategies Committee**

## **Final Meeting Summary April 14, 1999**

*Approved May 12, 1999*

**Present:** Dale Stedman, Chair, Bill Lampson, Vice Chair, Peter Hurley, Bettie Ingham, Patricia Otley

**Absent:** R. Ted Bottiger, Don Briscoe, Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, Arthur D. Jackson, Jr., Jennifer Joly, John Kelly, Representative Maryann Mitchell, Charles Mott

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The Chair called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. He reviewed the minutes from the March 10<sup>th</sup> meeting and asked for any proposed revisions. The Committee approved the minutes from the previous meeting as presented.

### **Transportation Budget Update**

Mike Doubleday, a member of the consultant team, presented a brief overview of the current transportation budget legislation. This information provided insight into how the current Legislature has addressed alternative investment strategies. Doubleday distributed a matrix that compared three transportation budgets under consideration in the Legislature (the Transportation Commission Budget, Governor's Budget, and the House Budget). Figures from the Senate budget, released the day before, were added where known. Though the session is scheduled to end April 25<sup>th</sup>, an extension is expected.

### **Discussion of Congestion Issue Papers**

Commissioners made several comments on the new round of papers on demand-side solutions to the congestion problem including the following:

- Some of the policies are risky, and there may be political ramifications that are a deterrent to their adoption. Members noted that many road-pricing examples come from international cities. No area in the U.S. has imposed tolls during peak hours, though high-occupancy/toll lanes are being implemented. Instead, gas tax financing has been the tradition since the early 1900s. Political feasibility weighs heavily, and it should. Citizen opposition arose when it was suggested that proposed additions to the SR-520 bridge be financed through direct user fees. The Committee needs to decide if it wants to keep these policies on the table for discussion.

- Committee members would like more information on what effect raising the speed limit in congested corridors has on congestion levels.
- Changes in federal law are the key to expanding “cash out” programs because the US Tax Code currently provides a disincentive for businesses to implement these programs. The Committee supported efforts to encourage Congress to change these policies. Committee members suggested that state mandates and regulations be avoided and that instead policies should focus on market-driven incentives.
- Committee members discussed the strengths of the gas tax as a revenue source because it is a broad-based user fee, even if it does not effect congestion levels. They discussed the merits of indexing the tax so that the value of the revenue is constant over time. Opposition to raising the gas tax is predictable, especially when large increases are proposed. Public distrust of government spending fuels this opposition. People may accept price increases in other areas of their lives, but not in relation to public infrastructure and government. One appeal of the gas tax lies in its direct relationship to the amount of driving that people do.
- Several regulations impede the construction of city or county roads, especially when state or federal money is involved. Each level of regulation adds more costs to construction, which is a loss to taxpayers. The Administration Committee is looking at this issue and seeking ways to minimize the costs of delivering services in this state. Charlie Howard from the Washington State Department of Transportation pointed out that the restrictions exist in order to achieve other societal objectives like environmental protection, noise reduction, safety, and aesthetics.
- High-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes are currently a controversial issue. The Committee does not feel comfortable discussing this issue without additional information and time to work through it. Perceived enforcement issues drove much of the recent opposition to opening HOV lanes to single-occupant vehicles at non-peak hours. Technology is now available to address enforcement and potentially to price the HOV lanes for single-occupant vehicles if unused capacity exists in the lane. Currently, WSDOT has prioritized new capacity in the form of HOV lanes over general-purpose lanes on the interstate system.

### **General Approaches to Optimizing Maintenance of Roadways and the Conditions and Prospects for State Highways**

Paula Hammond from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) described the road network that WSDOT owns and operates. The network includes 7,035 centerline miles of highways and 17,900 lane miles of highways in Washington. State highways are paved with three different types of pavements:

- Asphalt concrete, commonly referred to as blacktop, constitutes 62% of the network; it is flexible and lasts between 10-15 years before needing rehabilitation.
- Bituminous Surfaces consist of chip seals and have a shorter life of 6-8 years, but cover only 26% of the network.

- Portland Cement Concrete is the most expensive pavement to construct; however, the 12% of the network covered in this pavement has a life of over 30 years.

Maintenance and rehabilitation projects help to sustain pavement life. Dowel bar retrofit, chip sealing, pothole repair, asphalt overlay, and crack sealing all help to lengthen the period between rehabilitation cycles. Studded tires and heavy vehicles contribute to pavement deterioration by causing rutting and cracking. Freeze and thaw conditions also make the pavements less durable. The pavement structural condition of WSDOT-operated roads is generally good: 69% are considered in excellent condition, 23% in good condition, 7% in fair condition, and 1% are considered in poor condition. The lowest life-cycle cost method has allowed highway managers to minimize the cost of maintenance and rehabilitation by repaving road segments that reach certain criteria of rutting, roughness, or structural condition. WSDOT's highway maintenance and rehabilitation programs are funded for the foreseeable future given the current funding priorities.

At the request of the Committee, Hammond reviewed some demand-side solutions to the maintenance problem. First, make sure that the Snake and Columbia River drawdowns do not occur because they would shift more traffic to heavy trucks. A ton-per-mile tax, like the one imposed in Oregon, may limit the overloading of vehicles and improve pavement conditions. Restricting trucks to only one lane could decrease the deterioration of pavement. Additionally, another way to save money is to focus investment on the most used roadways and let others “go,” rather than repaving on a specified timeframe.

### **County Roads: Current Conditions and Estimates of Needed Repairs**

Chris Mudgett from the County Roads Administration Board (CRAB) provided an overview of county roads in Washington. Over 40,000 centerline miles and 80,000 lane miles of urban and rural roads compose the county road network, with an estimated value of almost \$22 billion dollars. CRAB requires that a licensed engineer manage the Road Department in each county, which includes overseeing the maintenance projects and pavement management systems. In 1997, counties spent \$222 million on maintenance and preservation, accounting for an average of 33% of the Road Department budgets.

In a recent survey, County Engineers identified an average annual shortfall for maintenance and preservation of approximately \$111 per year for six years (\$667 million total). Those estimates suggest that counties are currently funding about 67% of the maintenance and preservation activities needed to keep the roadway operating at current levels

Chris Mudgett identified several problems that contribute to wear-and-tear on county roads. In some counties, especially those engaged in agriculture, weight restrictions are not enforced. Even when enforcement occurs, the fines for non-compliant commercial vehicles do not return to the road fund for use in repairing the roads that the overloaded vehicles damage. Building a freight system with roads designed and built to handle heavy truckloads would limit the wear-and-tear on other roads.

## **City Streets: Current Conditions and Estimates of Needed Repairs**

Diane Carlson from the Association of Washington Cities discussed the maintenance conditions of city streets and the funding issues that cities face. City streets constitute 16% of the centerline miles in the state and carry 25% of the vehicle traffic (measured in vehicle miles traveled). City streets tend to include more amenities than county or state roads, such as sidewalks, trees, benches, streetlights, and curbs. Cities fund their transportation programs through the gas tax distribution (of which they receive 10% of the revenues), funds from the Transportation Improvement Board, local General Fund revenues, and other local, state, and federal sources. On average, cities can fund only 33% of their needed preservation activities, and AWC estimates that Washington cities have an unfunded maintenance need of \$1.4 billion. On average, medium and large cities rate their roads between fair and good on pavement structural conditions, while smaller cities tend to rate their roads in poor condition.

Some actions that would help cities better fund their maintenance and rehabilitation programs include the following:

- Increasing gas tax distributions
- Preservation programs for smaller cities
- Increased use and funding of pavement management programs
- New local transportation funding options for cities
- Encouragement of more inter-local partnerships
- Improving management of cuts in city streets by utility companies

## **Committee Discussion**

The Chair asked if it would be possible to obtain an agreed-upon figure on city, county, and state maintenance needs by September. The last successful effort to do so occurred in 1988 when the Legislature formed the Roads Jurisdiction Committee to consider every mile in the state and agree upon a fair gas tax distribution. Today, the agreement would be different regarding where responsibility for needs belongs, and this concern over distribution of funds may make finding a mutually agreed-upon figure difficult. The city, county, and state representatives agreed to provide more information on this issue to the Committee.

Committee members asked for information on several topics including estimates of needs by the September retreat, costs and benefits of PMS, effects of enforcement of weight restrictions, improved management of utility cuts, and efficiencies that could be gained through inter-local relationships or contracting.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.